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with life? It is the damndest thing to have happen to you. However, just so Don Crow won't get entirely the best of it, I'm sending the alligator a case of Red Heart dog-food.

Silver in Mississippi

This summer I went over to Oxford, Mississippi, to interview Dr. James Silver, the historian at the university there who has been so outspoken against racism. The television people set up their ungainly rigs on the grounds near where the riots took place, but there were all kinds of delays, and in the afternoon it began to rain. Some of the young collegiates passing us by in cars called out to us, "nigger-lovers," and properly certified, we went ahead with the interview in the rain, because the portable rig was costing the producers \$5,500 a day or some such, and they couldn't wait until tomorrow.

Silver worries, as any serious man in his position would worry, whether he has not, in becoming the most publicized Mississippi critic of Mississippi, turned on his home state and exploited his university. But there they are, the great Negro undermass of Mississippi and the South, poor, overworked, dirtyworked, and ghettoed, if only a white man with little contact with their reality can keep their reality fresh in his imagination.

"Do you ever feel," I asked Silver, "that it's somewhat unfair, even though maybe historically this is where you find yourself, that a professor has to serve this function, which is usually a more or less political function?"

"I think sometimes," he said, "that professors who are not in ivory towers but who are somewhat isolated can see what's going on in a community or society better

than people who are participating directly. And I suppose, in fact I know, as far as I'm concerned, that a great many people have dodged what I call their responsibility, lawyers and judges and newspaper people and church leaders, and so on. They know what the problem is, they know what needs to be done, and yet they are either afraid, or they're timid, or they're apathetic."

If you care about the South, I hope you have read, or will read, Silver's *Mississippi: The Closed Society*. There is much in it that is not new, but should not be forgotten. Silver stated his thesis in my interview with him:

"The whites themselves agree on what I call the official orthodoxy, which in the 1850's was slavery and which today is white supremacy, and this is backed up or buttressed by state sovereignty and fundamentalism in religion. The terrible thing about this society is that while most of the citizens go along with it, those who do not go along are told to keep quiet, and then when they don't keep quiet, they are threatened and they may even suffer violence.

September 18, 1964